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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE/EYES ONLY

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: Andrei A. Gromyko, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR
Anatoli F. Dobrynin, Ambassador to USA
Georgi M. Korniyenko, Chief of USA Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Mr. Bratchikov, Interpreter

Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President
Helmut Sonnenfeldt, NSC Senior Staff Member
Winston Lord, Special Assistant to Dr. Kissinger
John D. Negroponte, NSC Staff Member
Peter W. Rodman NSC Staff Member (notetaker)

DATE AND TIME: Sunday, May 28, 1972
10:45 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

PLACE: Conference Room - Foreign Minister's Office
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Moscow

SUBJECTS: Communique (briefly at beginning); Vietnam

The Communique

Dr. Kissinger: We thought we would have a quick run through of the communique.

For. Min. Gromyko: Soon the communique will shine like a diamond. Polishing and polishing . . . .

Dr. Kissinger: We agree to put into the European section, unless you object, the phrase "inviolability of frontiers."

For. Min. Gromyko: Good, very good.

Dr. Kissinger: Here is the retyped version [Tab A]. But we recommend writing in on page 10 to make it principles of territorial integrity and inviolability of frontiers." I was just talking to the President. This is why I was delayed. In view of the importance you attach to it. We thought it was the right thing to do.

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Fon. Min. Gromyko: I will tell Mr. Brezhnev. He will appreciate it.

Dr. Kissinger: For the agreed portion of the Middle East, we recommend this, which is a slight adaptation of yours. It is written into the text, but here is what we have [He hands over draft at Tab B.]

Mr. Korniyenko: You are changing what was agreed before.

Dr. Kissinger: What we had in the text was your version.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: We will study it more carefully.

Mr. Korniyenko: Your idea is, this will be all on the Middle East?

Dr. Kissinger: We would prefer not to have a disagreed statement on the Middle East. But if you prefer....

Fon. Min. Gromyko: This is intended as joint. Probably it will be difficult to avoid a one-sided statement.

Dr. Kissinger: We prefer a joint statement.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: We too would prefer that.

Dr. Kissinger: On Indochina, perhaps we should talk afterwards. We have a few sentences of a possible joint statement, rather ambiguously phrased, for your consideration. [Hands over the draft at Tab C.]

Fon. Min. Gromyko: Probably it will not be possible to avoid one-sided statements.

Dr. Kissinger: It may not be possible. I have two papers for you. The President has re-signed the protocol. There were a few technical problems. It is coming back through normal channels. Here is the President's letter, signed. It is exactly the text you had the other day. [Tab D] Compare it. If anything is wrong it will be redone this afternoon. May I mention a few other minor changes?

On our page 5, on Commercial and Economic Relations, we would like to say "it was agreed that a lend-lease settlement will be negotiated concurrently with a trade agreement." [See Tab A.] Not an integral part, but negotiated concurrently.

What is your information on the maritime problem?

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Fon. Min. Gromyko: Nothing new. We are awaiting your answer.

Dr. Kissinger: As I understand, it isn't done yet.

Mr. Sonnenfeldt: Yes.

Dr. Kissinger: Is anything likely to happen that will change that?

Mr. Sonnenfeldt: No.

Dr. Kissinger: The holdout is the unions. What the hell is Gibson doing here? What can he do here about the unions?

Amb. Dobrynin: I thought Gibson brought something.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: We accepted this lend-lease provision.

Dr. Kissinger: I will have to check on the maritime problem. I will talk to Gibson again. I understand Flanigan and the Secretary of State are seeing Kosygin this morning.

The other problem is, with respect to Europe, we should follow the same procedure as in the Berlin agreement. In the Russian text, "Berlin (West)"; in the English and French versions it says "Western sectors of Berlin." If you check you'll see. I think we should do it the same way. [Gromyko sends Bratchikov out to get a Berlin text.]

Fon. Min. Gromyko: We will check. We will say either "Berlin (West)" or the same as you, "Western sectors of Berlin." We will check.

Dr. Kissinger: That would be fine. We would be pleased if you said the same.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: All right. This is up to us.

Dr. Kissinger: On page 10, we dropped out the phrase "on Berlin" in reference to the September 3 agreement because it is on the previous page.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: It is possible.

Dr. Kissinger: Just to reduce the number of references. The Middle East I have given you. I would still like you to consider our Indochina

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section on page 12 [a blank page]. It would attract attention. It would be new.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: It is brief and to the point !

Mr. Korniyenko: On page 10, why do we need "non-interference and non-intervention"? In Russian it is the same.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: You have both.

Dr. Kissinger: In other words you want to interfere? You won't intervene but you will interfere? No, you are right, we'll drop one. We'll drop "non-intervention."

Fon. Min. Gromyko: In the Charter it says "non-interference."

Dr. Kissinger: I just want the record to show that we did not approve. Could we have an agreed interpretive statement that it includes non-interference?

Mr. Sonnenfeldt: "No significant interference."

Dr. Kissinger: Is it possible for us to have a Russian text of the communique, so our experts can check it?

Fon. Min. Gromyko: I have to show Mr. Brezhnev.

Dr. Kissinger: When? Could we have a tentative draft from you?

Fon. Min. Gromyko: Only with the understanding that Mr. Brezhnev still has to check it.

Dr. Kissinger: Yes. With the understanding that Mr. Brezhnev has not approved it.

On the publication of the SALT agreement, there seems to be a genuine misunderstanding. Our press office has been publishing texts all along, as they have been reached.

Amb. Dobrynin: Probably a misunderstanding. In Washington you said we would publish all at the end, attached to the final communique.

Dr. Kissinger: Did I say that? I did not mean that.

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Mr. Korniyenko: We will publish them all at once. See that the communique says the texts will be annexed. Ambassador Dobrynin's understanding was that the texts would be given with embargo.

Dr. Kissinger: So you think we should attach them?

Amb. Dobrynin: No reason.

Mr. Korniyenko: Also, it is not our terminology to say "the Soviet leaders" at the end. We should have the names.

Dr. Kissinger: Will they all come?

Mr. Kroniyenko: Yes, all accept. They may not all come.

Dr. Kissinger: In what order?

Mr. Korniyenko: Brezhnev, Podgorny, Kosygin.

Dr. Kissinger: We will use the titles from the front.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: Yes, it would be more dignified to have names, and not say leaders.

Dr. Kissinger: It would be a little complex if the whole Politburo came at once.

We accept your proposal. "The President of the US invited General Secretary Brezhnev, Chairman Podgorny, and Chairman Kosygin to visit the US at a mutually convenient time. This invitation was accepted."

Fon. Min. Gromyko: It is a diamond.

Dr. Kissinger: Can we say "with pleasure"?

Fon. Min. Gromyko: It is not dignified.

Dr. Kissinger: If we are asked by the press, can we say on a background basis that we are thinking in terms of the spring of next year?

Fon. Min. Gromyko: We shouldn't say. Not possible to specify.

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Dr. Kissinger: Can you check with Mr. Brezhnev? If asked by the press.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: For the time being it is to be worked out. Because we would have to check again.

[Pieces of bread with huge portions of caviar are brought in.]

Don't you think it looks fine?

Dr. Kissinger: True. I haven't eaten sinces 9:30.

I have two other matters. Vietnam we can discuss with the whole group, and then another with just Mr. Lord and Mr. Rodman.

You will give us an informal Russian text?

Fon. Min. Gromyko: Yes.

Dr. Kissinger: Could we also have a Russian text of the principles?

You've understood, Mr. Korniyenko, we have reversed "military confrontation and nuclear war."

Mr. Korniyenko: Yes.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: On Berlin, we will say "Western sectors of Berlin."

Dr. Kissinger: Good, we prefer it.

Again, in what form should we get this typed up for signing tomorrow?

Mr. Korniyenko: The principles?

Dr. Kissinger: Yes.

Mr. Korniyenko: In the most solemn way, like a treaty.

Dr. Kissinger: Yes. At what time?

Fon. Min. Gromyko: We need not set a time. Just after the last conclusion of the meeting. In the same hall, in the presence of photographers, etc.

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Dr. Kissinger: Our problem is only how to brief the press.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: It is your problem. A rather one-sided problem.

Amb. Dobrynin: What is the problem?

Dr. Kissinger: We would like to brief before the signing, so that they can move an explanation along with the text. If we don't, they will run out with the text and send it around the world with the wildest speculation of what it means. Therefore we would like to leave one hour or two after the plenary and before the signing. I will brief the press before, under an embargo. I can guarantee it will not be published.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: We accept your guarantee. Anyway, it must be signed before the reception.

Dr. Kissinger: If the reception is at 3:00, then have the signing at 2:45.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: For safety, let's have the signing at 2:00, then clear the room for the reception. The press is not our problem, we have a more advanced social system. We don't have problems with the press.

Dr. Kissinger: You are making it more attractive. Your ambassador is getting very good at handling the press. We will brief the press at 1:00 and embargo it until 2:30.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: I will inform Mr. Brezhnev. If there is any change I will inform you.

Dr. Kissinger: It will be the same as with SALT, no speeches.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: On the embargo, you say 2:30? Suppose we embargo until 5:00 p.m.?

Dr. Kissinger: Our press will be traveling at 5:00 p.m. It is early morning. As a practical matter it couldn't appear anywhere until afternoon. How about 3:00 p.m.?

Fon. Min. Gromyko: Okay, 3:00 p.m. Our afternoon paper is Izvestia.

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Dr. Kissinger: I notice Pravda has clipped me out of the picture twice. I'm very angry. My father will be angry.

Mr. Korniyenko: You should try to get more to the center.

Ambassador Dobrynin: You stand too far to the right!

Dr. Kissinger: Always.

Ambassador Dobrynin: You are too modest.

Mr. Lord: An unlikely hypothesis.

Dr. Kissinger: Mr. Lord will enjoy unemployment this summer. He will meet his family.

So, the Communique will be unsigned and the Principles will be signed. They will be released at the same time.

For. Min. Gromyko: Right.

Vietnam

Dr. Kissinger: So now let us take the easy matters.

For. Min. Gromyko: We have a Russian proverb: Morning is wiser than evening.

Dr. Kissinger: When I came here once in 1967 for a scientific conference, I told what I thought was a Russian proverb. Someone came running for help: "Vladimir is stuck in the mud up to his ankles!" He was asked why is that so alarming? The answer was, "He dived in head first." Is that Russian?

Ambassador Dobrynin: No, it's just an anecdote.

Dr. Kissinger: Now we discuss. . . .

For. Min. Gromyko: How to end the war.

Dr. Kissinger: Exactly. That is the principal question.

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For. Min. Gromyko: I would like to hear as far as possible to go. [sic] Full progress -- what should be done first, then second, and the interconnection. Please be as specific as possible. A matter of prestige should not be as important for the US, a big country. For us in such matters we discount this aspect. It should be the same with you.

Dr. Kissinger: I understand this point about prestige. But let me pick up the discussion.

First we believe that a useful first step would be if North Vietnam and we on a private basis could have the sort of discussion we have never had. As I told you before, we would be prepared to have it in Moscow. That is if we could say honestly to each other what we must have immediately and what we could have over a period of time. Then we could work out concrete progress.

The overwhelming problem is to distinguish matters which can be settled immediately and some to be left to an historical process. Some problems solve themselves if you don't force them to a resolution. You can create objective conditions. If you analyze our specific proposals in terms of precise present conditions, they have one meaning, and they mean another thing, in terms of other conditions. It is possible to interpret our political proposal as meaning we want to preserve the present government at all costs. It is also possible to interpret them as meaning we want a military solution alone. And once we have gone, there are new objective conditions.

We are not committed to maintaining a particular government in South Vietnam at all costs for all eternity, as the President said. We do not exclude that other political forces will play a large role. For this reason, while we are prepared to discuss a political solution, this will take a longer period. Therefore our basic idea as expressed by the President on May 8, to concentrate first on a ceasefire, is the best solution. I know the North Vietnamese are not interested. But we would be prepared as part of a ceasefire to state with the North Vietnamese some point principles for the political future of South Vietnam, for example:

-- that ultimately South Vietnam should be neutral.

-- that the U.S. will remain neutral with respect to the political process.

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-- that the U. S. is prepared to define certain limits to its military and economic assistance as part of an overall settlement.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: Please repeat the last one.

Dr. Kissinger: The U.S. is prepared to define certain limits to its military and economic assistance as part of an overall settlement. In other words, we are prepared to set some limits.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: What does military assistance involve?

Dr. Kissinger: To us, military assistance means delivery of supplies, not military operations. In other words we believe the best way to proceed is to have a ceasefire, an exchange of prisoners, and withdrawal of American forces -- together with a statement of principles on the objectives of a settlement.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: And the sequence with respect to the ceasefire and exchange of prisoners?

Dr. Kissinger: They should be simultaneous.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: So the exchange first.

Dr. Kissinger: Well, we could relate the exchange to the withdrawal of forces.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: At the completion of withdrawal.

Dr. Kissinger: Well, I would have to check. There is some flexibility.

Our judgment is that such a procedure would create new political realities. It would remove our military forces, it would commit us to a certain political evolution without being specific as to the composition, and it leaves the South Vietnamese to settle the political issue. We would be prepared to participate in the solution on the basis of these principles, but if we want to bring a rapid end to the war, this is the way to do it. If we talk about the political composition, we will talk until the end of the year.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: Could you be more specific with respect to the present President and government machinery? And elections?

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Dr. Kissinger: This approach I have given here is not specific. If we wanted a more comprehensive settlement, we could have elections, say, six months after the signature of the final document. President Thieu would resign one month before the elections. The elections would be run not by the government but by the electoral commissions. The electoral commissions would begin functioning on the day the agreement is signed, or immediately thereafter.

On these commissions each of the parties will be represented. It will have a three-part character, with the PRG, other elements, and the government.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: So, one-third for each.

Dr. Kissinger: Well, we would like to leave open the exact composition because we have not studied it. But the three-part part is established. These commissions will have responsibility for ensuring free elections, and should be given those functions necessary to ensure the freedom of the elections.

One month before the elections, Thieu and his Vice President will resign. This is our idea. In addition we are prepared to bring about an international guarantee to ensure that these commissions have the ability to assure freedom. We are prepared to join with you and other countries to ensure this. So the electoral commission is not dependent totally on the existing structure.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: What kind of international supervision?

Dr. Kissinger: Suppose we agree on an international commission. We are prepared to have an international presence in Vietnam to ensure that the commission can operate freely.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: In what form?

Dr. Kissinger: Composed of countries to which both sides agree. We are prepared to discuss it with you; we do not exclude a significant role for the socialist countries.

We believe that the combination of our withdrawal, the public declaration of principles, plus the imminent resignation of Thieu all combine to produce new political conditions to ensure a freer evolution of political life in

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South Vietnam -- and the more rapidly it is done the more this is true.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: About your latest measures. The mines, etc. Is it correct to suppose that the abolition of all this will be first, before a ceasefire?

Dr. Kissinger: It will be simultaneous with the ceasefire. As soon as all these are agreed, we will stop military operations.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: Not before.

Dr. Kissinger: Not before. The first step after a ceasefire. And we are prepared, as soon as a ceasefire is signed, to help sweep the mines or at least give advice on how to do it.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: In a ceasefire, do you provide for the possibility of no formal agreement or an "in-fact"? Must it be solemn and formal?

Dr. Kissinger: At the moment, we are thinking of a formal one. I am thinking out loud: we cannot accept delphic assurances of the ambiguous type the North Vietnamese specialize in -- but if we received a formal assurance from you, that is something we would take extremely seriously. It depends on the form, but we do not exclude it.

We prefer a formal agreement. It is easier for us, and we think that is what we should aim for.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: What is the place for a transitory [sic] coalition government?

Dr. Kissinger: Of course, in some respect the electoral commission represents a form of coalition.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: Of course it is limited to the election.

Dr. Kissinger: But for a month before the election, there is only a caretaker government. We do not exclude a coalition emerging from the election.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: Before the election, it is a commission.

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Dr. Kissinger: But before the election, we do not exclude giving the electoral commission a somewhat greater role. It would be better if left somewhat vague. But that is a subject for more precise negotiation. I am giving you only a perspective now.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: The international status of the government, neutrality. At what point would it be expressed?

Dr. Kissinger: I repeat, at the ceasefire, the U. S. is prepared to state certain principles. One is that the government that emerges from the process will be neutral.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: Only the U. S. Government? That is one-sided.

Dr. Kissinger: We are prepared to say it can be agreed by all parties. The way we are phrasing it is "a foreign policy in accordance with the 1954 Geneva Accords." As we said,

(1) The U. S. will support no candidate and remain completely neutral in the election.

(2) The U. S. will abide by the outcome of the election and of any other political process the South Vietnamese devise by themselves. We will state this unilaterally.

(3) The U. S. is prepared to define its military and economic relations with any government that exists in South Vietnam as part of an overall settlement.

We are prepared, together with these unilateral principles, to propose that South Vietnam and the other countries of Indochina should adopt a foreign policy consistent with the 1954 Geneva Accords, and secondly, that reunification should be decided by North and South Vietnam without outside interference. This is from Madame Binh's 7 points. I think they will accept their own point.

I repeat, Mr. Foreign Minister, they will of course be suspicious.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: The Vietnamese?

Dr. Kissinger: The North Vietnamese. I sometimes say they are more afraid of being deceived than of being defeated. I can only say that if we gave

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you these assurances, we would face the consequences of not only deceiving them but of deceiving you, with whom we are trying to start a new relationship.

Secondly, any observer of the American scene will confirm that the U. S. is not looking for excuses to reenter Indochina. Therefore the problem is to find ways to create new political conditions.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: Which elements of what you have said are unknown to the Vietnamese?

Dr. Kissinger: The explanation is unknown, the rationale of what we are trying to do, is unknown to them. They know only the formal points. Secondly, we have never related our political proposals to our May 8 proposal. We have never related the ceasefire to the political process of May 8 before.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: Separately, but not in interdependent form.

Dr. Kissinger: Another new element: we are prepared to have the release of POWs related to the withdrawal.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: Now, release and troops, completion of one and completion of the other.

Dr. Kissinger: Right. But the beginning of the process should be simultaneous.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: From the movement of the signing of the agreement.

Dr. Kissinger: Right.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: On the calendar, say, June to October.

Dr. Kissinger: By the end of October, all our forces would be out, and all our prisoners would be released. Of course, if we begin in June, it all slips by a month.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: May I ask, is it possible for you to meet officially? Maybe it is a matter of prestige. They are a small country. Suppose they are reluctant for an informal meeting, why not make this officially first? If official, then it is made easier.

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Dr. Kissinger: First, the North Vietnamese have a tendency to give the impression they are doing us a great favor to meet privately.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: Maybe you are right. But it is only a part of this matter of prestige.

Dr. Kissinger: They always say they are meeting with a spirit of goodwill. I ask how this is manifest; they say by coming here. Therefore I don't consider it a concession.

Secondly, if there is a public meeting without any assurances of what will happen, it is exactly foreseeable what will happen: after two or three, we will walk out again.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: You miss one thing. You cannot negotiate that way. It is almost unpalatable for your vis-a-vis to agree beforehand what the outcome will be. They are a small country. Even a small country cannot accept preconditions for a meeting. The Ivory Coast, Guatemala.

Dr. Kissinger: Our condition is not that they accept what we propose but that they discuss what we propose. They put forward 7 or 9 points and refuse to discuss anything else. It is they who impose conditions. They say, be more concrete. What does "more concrete" mean? It means to accept their 7 points.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: Suppose we tell the Vietnamese of our discussion here in Moscow, and we decide both sides' proposals will be discussed. Suppose we say the only precondition of the Americans is that their proposals should not be excluded from the discussion. If they are told both sides are free to submit . . . .

Dr. Kissinger: They never refuse our right to submit them, they refuse to discuss them. They say the only correct solution is the 7 points of the PRG and the two amendments of February.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: But you did it the same way, perhaps, but without the gestures?

Dr. Kissinger: No, there are some of theirs we can accept. The way to negotiate seriously is to put ours next to theirs and see what can be reconciled.

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Fon. Min. Gromyko: But what matters is the outcome of the meeting. Suppose they are polite and the form is good.

Dr. Kissinger: May I make a counterproposal? Let them be impolite and be willing to discuss our 8 points! There should be a real negotiation.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: What if they reject discussing your proposals but out of the discussion something emerges that reaches an understanding? It should be discussed, but the matter of prestige and form is disproportionate.

Dr. Kissinger: That isn't the issue. In 149 meetings, nothing serious has happened, neither procedure nor substance. I understand their strategy -- which has now failed. They are trying to bring such a sense of hopelessness in the U.S. that it will undermine the President in the U.S. They want to use the plenaries to create the impression of total deadlock and to generate tremendous pressures on us to yield. But it is too late for that now.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: For 27 years the U.S. and USSR exchanged notes and messages with plenty of "eagles" [hawks?] and with West Germany. But suddenly the treaty is reached. Each note had plenty of "eagles." Why do you exclude that?

Dr. Kissinger: But the big difference is that there is a war going on. If we have a ceasefire, we would be delighted to negotiate for 27 years on the political future.

We cannot tolerate any longer that they are directing their entire policy against the domestic structure of the United States. It is not prestige but substance.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: You exaggerate, to say it is directed against the Presidency as an institution and the domestic structure.

Dr Kissinger: If there is a possibility of serious negotiations, if you said to us that on the basis of these considerations -- not that they accept every detail -- but that this framework is of interest to them, then we are prepared to resume.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: What if at the meetings both sides are free to submit proposals? Don't take every statement they take seriously.

Dr. Kissinger: When we were in Moscow in April, we accepted your proposal not to make this a question of prestige. There were two plenaries

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and a private meeting. They used the plenary -- after pressing for six weeks -- to make a statement they could make unilaterally but which the plenary gives them a forum for. Then at the private meeting, they only read the published text of the two points. I asked if there was anything new. They insisted on them in the private meeting in the form of an ultimatum. I would have preferred -- I will tell you my strategy -- that they had something new. They didn't think we would take strong military measures. They wanted to create the impression of deadlock, to create pressures in the U.S., to repeat 1968. You know, if you want to keep negotiations going it is easy to offer something to create the right impression -- you can always say you have something to explore. They were determined to break up the meeting on May 2.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: This is all in the past. What if we could tell them the Americans are ready to take part in the full meeting but only if both sides' proposals can be discussed?

Dr. Kissinger: If they want to settle quickly, the private sessions are the best. The White House is in the best position to do it. We are the party to talk to. We give Porter his instructions. It is not just more authority, but we are more flexible than the bureaucracy can possibly be, and I hope more farsighted.

I am not looking for an excuse to break up the private meetings but to keep them going.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: If official meetings take place, it is much easier then to have a private meeting.

Dr. Kissinger: Why?

Fon. Min. Gromyko: It is a matter of prestige. It is easier for you to give way.

Dr. Kissinger: No, you are wrong. Right now the meetings are suspended. We are in a defensible position. If we meet again and nothing happens, we will be under fire. We will be ciriticized in the U.S. for having missed an opportunity, etc. Last year, we were attacked for six months. We are in a good position. It is a matter of protecting our public position, not just prestige. We will negotiate if they give us some perspective.

If they are serious, why don't they say they are ready to talk privately? We will go immediately to the plenary sessions.

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Fon. Min. Gromyko: It stops on the same spot. We cannot understand that: "Tell us in advance that you are serious." To us it is tantamount to saying they have to accept your position first.

Dr. Kissinger: We are not asking that. We are asking for a private meeting to discuss what the plenaries will discuss.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: I hope you don't mean in advance of the meetings.

Dr. Kissinger: They don't have to agree to our proposal. Just an approximate agenda should be agreed to, and an approximate procedure. Then we would go to a plenary.

What is your opinion?

Fon. Min. Gromyko: Formalization creates additional difficulties. I would say to them, first, of what you said yesterday and today. With respect to official meetings, the Americans are ready having in mind that the two sides are free to submit suggestions and both sides' suggestions will be considered and discussed. Under such conditions the U.S. agrees. This is what we would say. In our opinion, we think if you have an official meeting -- it is difficult to imagine it is not possible -- a more favorable opportunity would be created for the closed meeting as well.

Dr. Kissinger: I absolutely reject the proposition that we have to pay any price for a private meeting.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: It is not a price.

Dr. Kissinger: It is more of a sacrifice for me. If they are interested in settling the war quickly, the most efficient method is to discuss with me privately.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: Let us not talk about the unofficial, only the official.

Dr. Kissinger: What do you think their position is?

Fon. Min. Gromyko: On the basis of their statements, we have the impression that they consider that their proposals will be the basis of discussion. The idea of both sides having equal status has not entered their ideas. This would be something important. There will be light.

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Dr. Kissinger: Last time, after my visit to Moscow and after our agreement to resume the plenaries, there was a great statement from Hanoi that this was a great victory for the progressive forces, and defeat for the U.S.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: Suppose you were "defeated"? A "great victory" undermining the U.S.!

Dr. Kissinger: This is an impossible procedure. If we accepted this framework -- could we agree that neither side will claim a victory and both sides will say publicly that the purpose of the meeting is to discuss the positions of each side?

Fon. Min. Gromyko: To agree on this.

Dr. Kissinger: I am just pessimistic.

It is impossible for them to win militarily, it is impossible for them to accomplish their domestic objectives in the U.S., it is impossible for them to succeed in this negotiating strategy. Moreover, they will be worse off in November, after the election. What we are asking is no ultimatum. We ask only that we discuss it with them in the most efficient forum, in the only forum where we can talk and rapidly and where we are alone with them. It is hard to discuss the replacement of the Government in a forum with that government.

With respect to the plenaries, we ask first that they stop using them for propaganda and second, that they seriously examine our proposals and we will seriously examine theirs.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: Whose position is propaganda is a matter of opinion. Who is the judge?

Dr. Kissinger: You will presumably communicate our proposal to them.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: But we want a ray of light.

Dr. Kissinger: Obviously if there is any chance, we are eager to negotiate. We want to negotiate seriously in an efficient forum.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: Can we say we have agreed with the Americans that they will consider the plenaries if both sides can freely submit proposals and both will be discussed?

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Dr. Kissinger: Can you explain to me. Why are they so eager for the official meetings?

Fon. Min. Gromyko: I can't say with 100% certainty.

Dr. Kissinger: But you must have an idea. You must have thought about it. For three and a half years there have been plenary meetings and not one issue has been settled.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: Why is it so important? Why do you insist on this?

Dr. Kissinger: Because the breakup of the meetings will be a serious political fact.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: But it is you who break up the meetings.

Dr. Kissinger: They will barrage us with ambiguous statements. Last year I saw Le Duc Tho on June 26 and he had 9 points. Four days later they published their 7 points. All summer long they kept attacking us publicly for not responding to their proposals, five of which we had already accepted. We had constantly to defend ourselves before Congress and the newspapers. You never did this when we negotiated on Berlin or anything else.

Fon. Min. Gromyko: Suppose we contact them, in a positive form, that if you agree to attend the official meetings, they would agree that each side's proposals will be discussed. If both sides' ideas are discussed in the meeting, the problem of strings attached is taken care of.

Dr. Kissinger: How can we avoid the problem we went through before?

Fon. Min. Gromyko: They will answer in the course of the meeting. This interval is being used for thinking, by them and by you. How can you say in advance what will happen?

Dr. Kissinger: It is one thing if they said to us, we want to settle quickly; then it is only a question of effieicncy -- how to do it most effectively. That's one way. But if they make out of the fact of the meetings itself another political confrontation, that is another matter. Frankly, their strategy has failed. They cannot win militarily. They cannot defeat us politically, and we will be in a stronger position after November. That is our assessment. We want to settle the war. We have no interest in its continuation. We have

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no permanent interests [involved], and it hampers our relations with you and other countries.

One aspect of the plenaries -- if we resume them and fail, we will be attacked in America for having been fooled again by you. As your Ambassador knows, this happened last time. I don't believe we were fooled, but it is one of the criticisms that were made. I believe you were sincere. Why would you have an interest in doing something that will be found out in two weeks?

[The President called Dr. Kissinger and there was a ten minute break, from 12:45 - 12:55 p.m.]

Dr. Kissinger: We have now solved the problem of how to mention Mr. Brezhnev in the speech.

We believe the war must be ended rapidly. And therefore we have no interest in delaying the negotiations. But we have had a difficult experience. Vietnam is more difficult for us than Berlin is for you because Vietnam is an active major concern to many Americans day in and day out. I can assure you that as soon as North Vietnam indicates it is willing to settle, we will move -- the Ambassador tells me "generously" is a bad word in Russian -- in a forthcoming spirit.

Let me repeat my view, which I have to check with the President: If the other side confirms that both sides' programs will be discussed -- and if they do so in a way that gives us confidence, we don't exclude a return to the plenaries. There are provisos. If they are determined to make propaganda statements, I tell you frankly -- they must choose between dealing with our public domestic situation, with our opponents, or dealing with the Government. If the former, it is unacceptable. If the latter, we are prepared. If they attempt to create pressures, we will deal with the pressures. If they keep quiet for a few weeks, a return to the plenaries is not excluded -- especially if the assurances come through a government we take very seriously, such as yours. Another thing -- last time, as soon as we agreed to a plenary, they started three offensives. This would not be helpful. But we do not exclude the plenaries in the framework we discussed.

[At 1:00 p.m., Mr. Sonnenfeldt, Mr. Negroponte, and Mr. Korniyenko left. After a break, discussion resumed on the Middle East.]